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MEMORANDUM

Iran: The Left and the War

The Iranian left has taken a fairly low profile since the beginning of the war but it is trying to capitalize on the situation to improve its political position. Leftist leaders hope to use the war to recover from the damage inflicted by the regime during the crackdown on leftist parties last summer. []

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The left has already gained some advantages from the war. The regime's attention has been focused on the battlefield and the campaign against the left has been at least temporarily suspended. The confusion of the war and the diversion of Revolutionary Guards and military forces to the border has probably made it somewhat easier for the leftists to operate in Tehran and other large cities. []

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[] militia men from all three major leftist groups--the Mujahedin, Fedayeen, and the pro-Soviet Tudeh--have taken part in the fighting for Khorramshahr, Abadan and the other major cities in Khuzestan. The leftist militias reportedly are working closely with Revolutionary Guards in the province. The leader of the Tudeh Party's Khuzestan wing reportedly was killed in the street fighting in Khorramshahr recently and given a well publicized martyr's funeral near Tehran. []

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Tudeh Views

The Tudeh's newspaper, Mardom, which was banned last August, has reappeared. The party line continues to back the Khomeini regime on all key issues. Party leader Kianuri

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has publicly urged the regime to form a national unity government including "all patriots without exception" and negotiate a formal agreement on cooperation between Muslim and leftist parties. [REDACTED]

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Kianuri has also urged the Khomeini regime to improve ties with the Soviets. He has claimed that Moscow supports Iran against Iraq and pointed to the Soviets refusal to date to initiate a massive military resupply of Iraq. [REDACTED]

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Kianuri has also apparently succeeded in stifling a challenge to his leadership of the Tudeh lead by former party chief Radmanesh. Radmanesh had returned to Iran from his exile in East Germany three months ago and planned to lead a campaign to discredit Kianuri's policy of supporting Khomeini. [REDACTED]

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We expect that the Tudeh and other leftists will seek to increase their own efforts to infiltrate the officer corps in order to prevent a military takeover. The Tudeh in particular has been working to establish a sizable clandestine organization in the military since the fall of the Shah. [REDACTED]

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Outlook

The leftists remain badly divided and are still too weak to challenge the regime directly. If the war goes badly for Iran, however, the left will seek to take advantage of the anti-clerical backlash and the economic dislocations caused by the loss of Khuzestan. In the short run the leftists are gaining valuable experience in street fighting and improving their image as defenders of Iran's national interests. [REDACTED]

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